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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1267  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/22/2018  
TAGS: [KJUS](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: FARC AND NARCOTRAFFICKERS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE URABA

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.  
Reasons 1.4 b and d

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Members of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community (PC) told us February 5 that paramilitary groups, in collusion with the military and police, continue to threaten and kill community members. The military denied the allegations, stating their focus is combating the increased FARC and narcotrafficking presence in the region, as well as complying with the Inter-American Court on Human Rights order to protect the PC. Local priest Leonidas Moreno agreed the PC was victimized by paramilitary groups, but criticized the Inter-Ecclesiastic Commission for Justicia y Paz (a human rights group), for manipulating PC members to take an aggressive anti-GOC stance and to ignore FARC abuses. Accion Social reviewed its community development projects, including

efforts to help 1350 families return to the San Jose de Apartado area. A human rights official told us the military has improved its relations with civilians, but said soldiers' harassment of peasants remains a problem in rural areas. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Polcouns and Poloff visited Apartado, as well as the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community (PC), on February 5 to review local security, political and economic conditions. We met with 17th Brigade officials, regional Colombian National Police Commander (CNP) Jorge Murillo, regional Accion Social director Luis Mario Gaviria, Father Leonidas Moreno, former San Jose de Apartado Defensor and current Accion Social official Ruben Dario Diaz, Apartado Mayor Osvaldo Cuadrado, and senior officials in the Prosecutor General's Office in Turbo.

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PEACE COMMUNITY CONTINUES TO FEEL THREATENED  
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13. (C) Members of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community told us illegal armed groups--supported by the military and police--continue to threaten and murder PC members. The daughter of Maria Margarita Giraldo told us her mother, a 48 year old woman and PC member, was killed by the military on December 23 near her home in Arenas Bajas, which is located an hour away from San Jose de Apartado's Peace Community. She alleged the military subsequently threatened her to implicate her mother in FARC activity, prompting her to flee to the PC. Other community members, including Wilson David,

complained the military continues to stigmatize community members as "guerrillas, steals from their homes, and harasses them during military operations. The leaders explained that 46 families affiliated with the PC live in La Holandita near San Jose de Apartado, 58 families live in La Union, and another 156 families with community ties live in rural areas in Apartado. (Note: These numbers are much larger than those recognized by the GOC as formal PC members).

¶4. (SBU) The leaders said that since the community's founding in 1997, Colombian military and their paramilitary collaborators have murdered over 160 PC members. No one has been held accountable for these crimes. They denounced the paramilitary demobilization process as a "farce," and said the GOC needs to do more to implement the protection measures called for by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR). PC members reiterated their refusal to cooperate with GOC authorities, but voiced hope that a recent Colombian Court ruling requiring the military to release the names of personnel stationed in the region would assist in investigations.

¶5. (SBU) Despite their statements that the situation remains the same, PC members said twelve families affiliated with the PC plan to return to their homes in Mulatos, a rural area with significant FARC and military presence. (Note: The February 2005 murder of eight PC members, allegedly by the military, occurred near Mulatos. An Army Captain has been detained for his alleged involvement in the massacre). The leaders said the returnees would not cooperate with Accion Social, and denounced the military's and Accion Social's attempts to reach out to non-PC residents of San Jose de Apartado as little more than attempts to bribe them to spy on the peace community.

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CHURCH VIEW DIFFERS FROM PEACE COMMUNITY STORY  
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¶6. (C) Father Moreno, a local priest who founded the peace communities in Uraba in 1997, told us the Church conceived of the communities as a way to organize people to defend their land and maintain community solidarity in the face of widespread paramilitary violence in the mid-1990s. The Church set up 54 peace communities in 1996-97; the Peace Community in San Jose de Apartado was one of the first. The Church realized it needed help to support the communities, and sought assistance from the Centro de Investigacion y Educacion Popular (CINEP), a Jesuit human rights group, and other religious orders. Moreno said the Inter-Ecclesiastic Commission for Justice and Peace worked with the San Jose de Apartado PC, but local Church officials quickly became concerned by the group's ideological bias that attributed all wrongs to the GOC and excused terrorist abuses. As a result, the Apartado Catholic Diocese, as well as CINEP, severed its ties to the group..

¶7. (C) Moreno said the Church considers the ideological, confrontational approach adopted by Justicia y Paz and its leader, Father Giraldo, toward the GOC to be counterproductive. This approach has not helped community members. He predicted the PC would eventually win its cases in the IACHR, because the community has been victimized by paramilitaries aided and abetted by the security forces over the years. Still, he said it would take years for PC members to receive concrete benefits from these judgments. Meanwhile, Justicia y Paz's ideological blinders cause it to ignore the FARC's infiltration and abuse of the community.

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17TH BRIGADE ADDRESS CONCERNS RAISED BY COMMUNITY  
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¶8. (C) 17th Brigade executive officer Colonel Rafael Forero-Gomez reviewed with us recent combat deaths, including the killing of Maria Margarita Giraldo in Arenas Bajas. He said the military--with Technical Investigative Body (CTI) authorization--conducted the initial investigation at the scene due to security concerns. A soldier was killed in

combat while transporting the cadaver to Turbo. Forero-Gomez said the military subsequently provided security to enable the CTI and the local prosecutor general in Turbo to visit the scene, including the home of the deceased, to reconstruct events. The CTI spent three days at the site. The CTI official and Turbo prosecutor in Turbo told us they continue to investigate the case, but noted that their preliminary investigation supported the military's contention that she died in combat.

¶9. (C) Forero-Gomez said the 17th Brigade deploys close to 90 military personnel around the San Jose de Apartado PC at all times to meet the protection requirements established by the IACHR. 17th Brigade legal advisor Major Borbon told us he oversees offices dealing with operational law, human rights issues, and disciplinary issues. He confirmed that the Brigade notifies the CTI immediately of any combat deaths and works with them to assist whenever possible.

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REGIONAL SITUATION CONTINUES TO PRESENT CHALLENGES  
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¶10. (C) Father Moreno said the paramilitary demobilization sharply reduced violence in the region, creating an opportunity to advance on economic and political issues. Former EPL guerrilla and Apartado Mayor Osvaldo Cuadrado, who demobilized in 1991, spoke to us about major development plans (road construction, port enhancements, aluminum smelter). Still, CNP Colonel Jorge Murillo said Uraba's location along major arms and drug smuggling routes contributes to ongoing instability. He commented that a war between "Don Mario," brother of former paramilitary leader Freddy Rendon, and other narcotraffickers for control of smuggling routes in Uraba has led to numerous murders. Such killings are sometimes called "social cleansing," but they involve one criminal gang killing members of another gang. Murillo conceded that corruption led some CNP personnel to collude with new criminal groups, but said the CNP is committed to identifying and punishing corrupt elements. He explained that CNP checkpoints on the road between Apartado and San Jose de Apartado are designed to deter the FARC and protect the PC.

¶11. (C) Ruben Dario Diaz (currently with Accion Social and the former Defensor of San Jose de Apartado) told us that the FARC maintains a serious presence in the region, descending from the mountains to attack the police on highways and in the lowlands. He said former paramilitaries continue to operate, recently murdering several individuals allegedly tied to the FARC, but stressed it was not clear that such groups enjoyed security forces' support. He added that the military no longer uses demobilized paramilitary members in its "redes de cooperantes" (voluntary informant networks) as it did in early 2007. Diaz said the Army continues to improve relations with civilians in the area, but noted that some soldiers continue to harass peasants living in rural areas. Hence, many peasants trust the FARC more than the Army.

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ACCION SOCIAL PROGRAMS IN SAN JOSE DE APARTADO  
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¶12. (C) Luis Mario Gaviria, regional coordinator for Accion Social, highlighted the agency's efforts to facilitate the return of 1350 families to the region and to foster economic development in San Jose de Apartado. He denied the PC's claims that the programs are in place to "destroy the peace community," noting that Accion Social respect the PC's refusal to participate in GOC programs. Gaviria pointed to social development programs in agriculture, music, education, home construction, and infrastructure support as evidence of GOC investment in the region.  
Brownfield